

The Promised One

Luke 2.25-38

December 24

In his beautiful narrative of the birth of Jesus in Luke 1-2, two major themes stand out in the biblical text. First, Luke highlights the role of the Spirit using six references to the Spirit (1.15, 35, 41, 67; 2.26, 27). Second, Luke described the faithfulness of Joseph and Mary to fulfill the law of Moses by five references (Luke 2.22,23,24,27,39). Bringing these two themes together, Luke sets forth the Spirit and a heart of obedience are correlated truths.

Joseph and Mary faithfully followed Old Testament ceremonies associated with the birth of a newborn son. They obeyed the Old Testament teachings about the purification ritual of the mother after childbirth and the dedication of the firstborn son to God. During their observance of these rituals, two devout Jewish believers testified to the status of the newborn as the Messiah.

Let us briefly analyze the rituals associated with the birth of a son that Joseph and Mary fulfilled. First, Mary performed the ceremony of purification of the mother forty days after the birth of Jesus (Lev. 12.1-8). A mother was ritually unclean during this period. Instead of the typical offering of a sheep, Mary offered two-turtle doves, the sacrifice of the poor (Lev. 12. 8). Second, Joseph and Mary presented their child to the Lord. Since the firstborn child or animal belonged to the Lord, Joseph and Mary offered an offering redeeming the first-born son (Num. 18.15).

What did Simeon and Anna teach about the nature of the child of Joseph and Mary?

First, Simeon communicated with the parents that the birth of Jesus was both light and darkness (Luke 2.25-35). Luke characterizes Simeon as a devout Jewish believer anticipating the blessings of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit resided on him and revealed that Simeon would not die before he saw the Messiah. When Joseph and Mary brought Jesus into the temple, Simeon praised God (notice the poetic structure). His words have come down throughout Christian history as the "Nunc Dimittis" – a Latin title for Simeon's praise meaning "Now Depart." As Simeon held the baby Jesus, Simeon claimed that he realized his life purpose and was now ready to die. As Simeon held the baby Jesus, Simeon declared that he his life purpose and he was now prepared to die. Yet, recalling the imagery of Isa. 60.1-3, his praise contained prophecy. Jesus would be the light of salvation for Jews and Gentiles (v. 32). Jesus' ministry as Savior was not limited to one nation; instead, Jesus came to serve as the Savior of Gentiles and Jews. One scholar commented that light creates shadows. Jesus is the light of salvation, yet anyone that rejects the light would experience a fall (v. 34). Furthermore, Mary herself would experience darkness as she witnessed opposition to her son and the horrible crucifixion.

Second, the prophetess Anna spoke about Jesus to Jews expecting redemption (Luke 2. 36-38). Rather than recording any prophecy from the prophetess Anna, Luke highlights Anna's role in the temple. Luke records her lifestyle in the temple and her message of redemption through Jesus. Anna lived the majority of her life as a widow. God gave her a ministry of intercessory prayer. "At the very moment" after Simeon's words, Anna (a name meaning "grace") begin communicating the redemptive grace available through Jesus.

Notice the divine timing through which both of these ordinary believers encountered Christ. The Holy Spirit directed Simeon as he entered the temple for him to hold Jesus (v. 27). "At the very moment," after Simeon spoke, Anna spoke, "about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." (v. 38 CSB). Has God directed your life to this very moment to respond positively a salvation God has "prepared in the presence of all peoples (v. 31)?